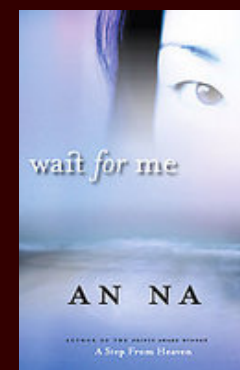
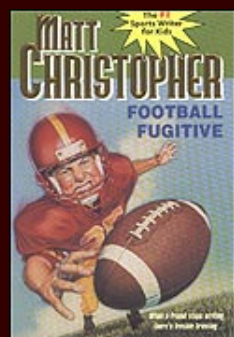
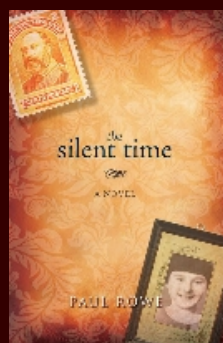
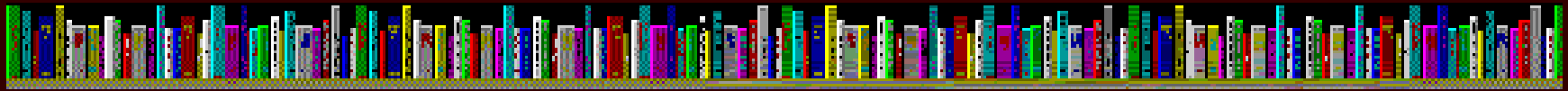


Deaf Characters in Adolescent Literature: *the portrayals and perceptions*

Sharon Pajka-West, Ph.D.





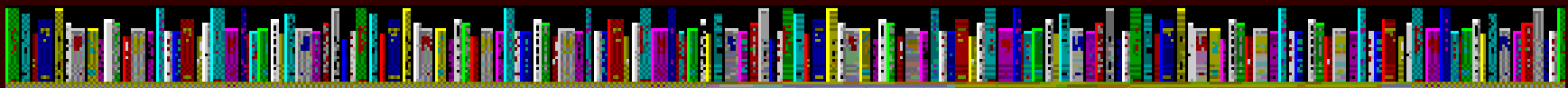
Goals:

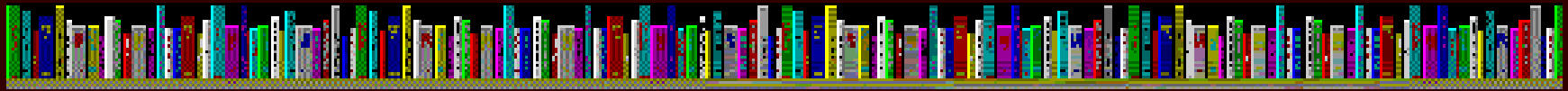
To give an overview of my research study,
*The portrayals and perceptions of deaf characters in
adolescent literature*

To acknowledge the differences in portrayals of deaf
characters by deaf and hearing authors

To highlight contemporary adolescent literature texts
with a range of deaf characters

To share resources (websites, books, and articles)
highlighting children's/adolescent books with deaf
characters





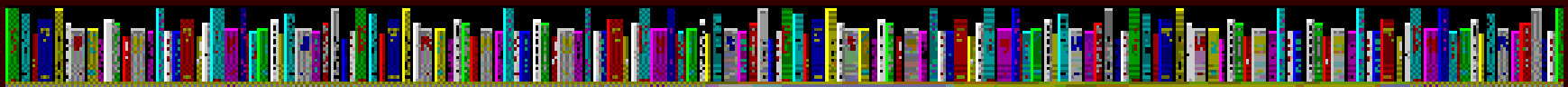
Research Questions:

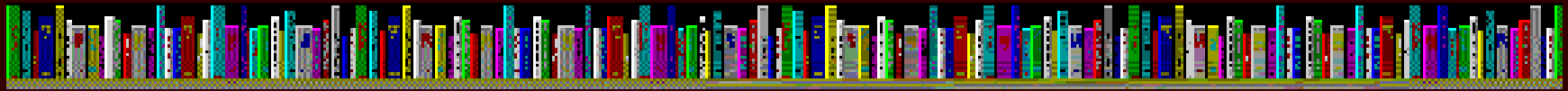
Are deaf characters being presented as culturally Deaf characters or as pathologically deaf and disabled?

Do readers favor deaf authors over hearing ones? If so, why?

How do deaf and hearing adult readers perceive deaf characters in adolescent literature?

How do the participants' responses and perceptions of deaf characters relate to the check-off forms based upon the authors' portrayals?



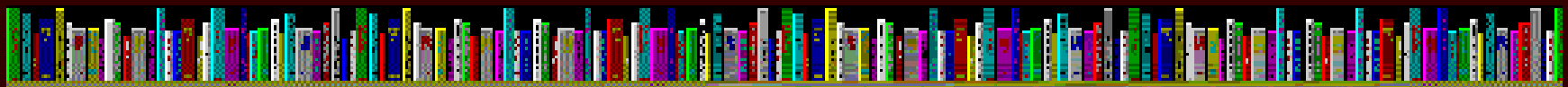


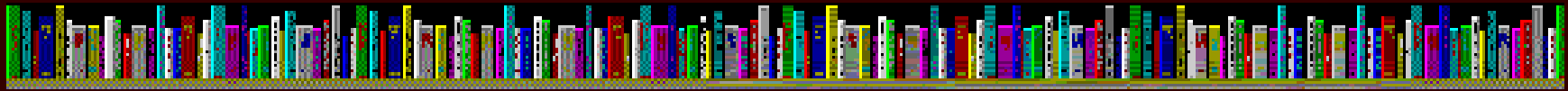
Problem

Acquiring fictional books with deaf characters can be time-consuming and challenging.

Few scholars have conducted research on the topic.

- of those even fewer have focused their attentions to adolescent fiction





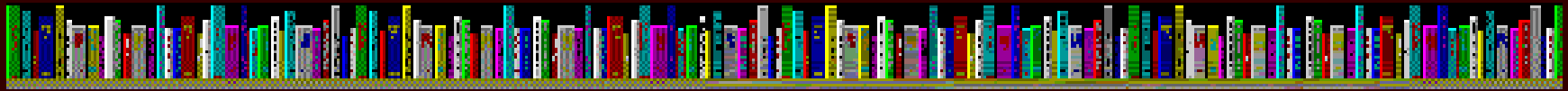
Research on the portrayals of deaf characters

Lack of attention to the topic (Civiletto & Schirmer, 2000).

Limited empirical research (Burns, 1950; Guella, 1983; Krentz, 2002, Wilding-Diaz, 1993).

A lack of understanding regarding the representation of deaf characters in literature (Batson & Bergman, 1985; Bergman, 1987; Burns, 1980; Krentz, 2002; Panara, 1972; Taylor, 1974, 1976a, 1976b, Schwartz, 1980; Wilding-Diaz, 1993).

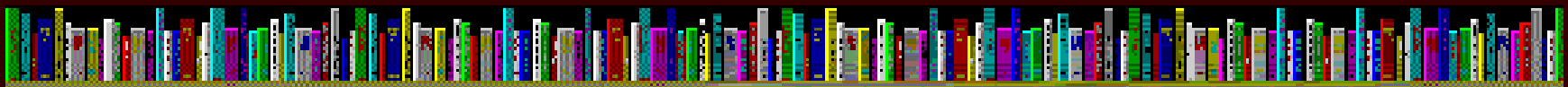
Deafness used as a literary device (Batson & Bergman, 1985; Bergman, 1987; Burns, 1980; Krentz, 2002; Panara, 1972; Taylor, 1974, 1976a, 1976b, Schwartz, 1980; Wilding-Diaz, 1993).



Research Need:

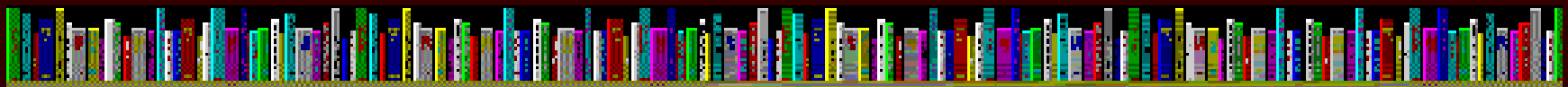
Researchers acknowledge the limited research and request more scholarship pertaining to the depiction of deaf characters in literature (Burns, 1950; Guella, 1983; Krentz, 2002; Wilding-Diaz, 1993).

I applied my skills as a knowledgeable literary critic and an educator of the deaf to evaluate selected adolescent fiction with deaf characters and surveyed the perceptions of a jury of readers reflective of a wide range of individuals of which 2/3 were acquainted with deaf people or deaf.



Influential Research: Literature Pertaining to Diversity and Multiculturalism in Adolescent Fiction

Despite decades of research affirming culturally authentic children's literature and the merits of multicultural literature, a coexisting body of research reveals the lack of culturally authentic texts (Applebee, 1992; Campbell & Wirtenberg, 1980; Ernest, 1995; Larrick, 1965; Sherriff, 2005; Taxel, 1986).





Authentic Literature

Authentic multicultural literature =

- one that is based upon fact (cultural accuracy),
- one that reproduces the crucial features of the original (cultural accuracy),
- one that is true to the creator's own cultural personality, spirit, or character (cultural immersion).

For multicultural literature to be considered “authentic” it must include evidence that it is

- grounded in the accurate facts of the culture
- the authors have faithfully adhered to the culture in their literary interpretations.

(Dresang, 2006)



When diverse characters are portrayed realistically and authentically in fiction,

Children's attitudes about race and gender are affected positively (Campbell & Wirtenberg, 1980; Jetton & Savage-Davis, 2005).

Children begin to understand a sense of 'self' (Campbell & Wirtenberg, 1980; Grice & Vaughn, 1992).

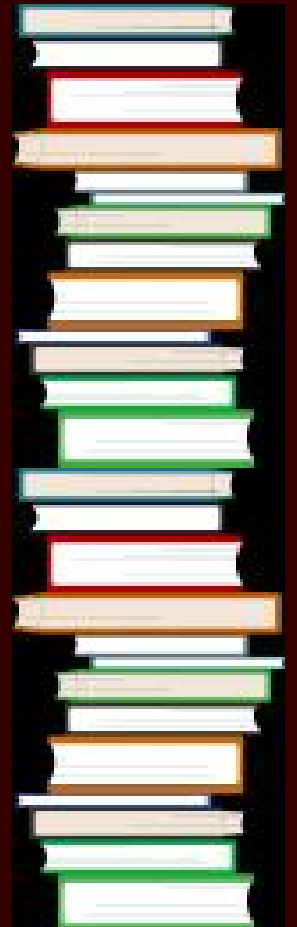
Children show an increase in enjoyment (Smith, 1995).

Children who had been identified as low ability students showed an interest in books with diverse characters. Researchers discovered that these children's reading levels had been misrepresented as grades lower than the students could read (Grice & Vaughn, 1992).

The Sample:

Content Analysis

- 100+ Books narrowed to
 - 6 adolescent books with deaf characters



Criteria for selecting books for this study

Only chapter books (not Picture Books)

Juvenile, Adolescent or Cross-over books

Realistic Fiction (did not include Magic Realism or Historical Realism)

Availability (access to books through the public library and/or bookstore)

In-publication (books no longer published)

Main Character(s) must be deaf.

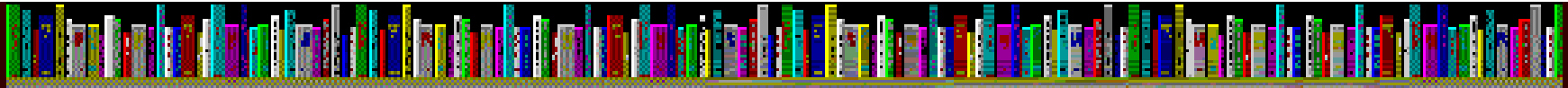
Main character(s) must be human (deaf animals or books based upon hearing ear dogs were not included)

50% of the books' authors will be deaf; 50% of the books' authors will be hearing

All books written in English or translated into English

Books based in the United States to reflect American deaf characters.

Will include the most recent book selections (within last 15 years of publication or reissuing of publication)



Books used in my research

Blatchford, C. *Nick's Secret*.

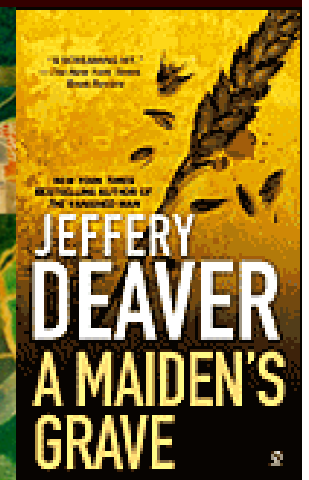
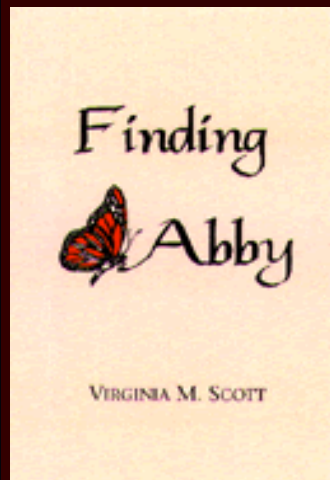
Deaver, J. *A Maiden's Grave*.

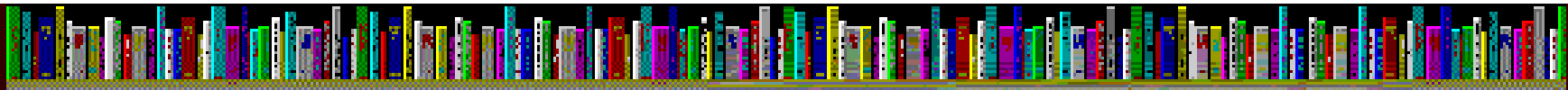
Ferris, J. *Of Sound Mind*.

Matlin, M. *Deaf Child Crossing*.

Riskind, M. *Apple is my Sign*.

Scott, V. *Finding Abby*.





Methodology: Instrumentation

Content Analysis

The Adolescent Literature Content Analysis check-off form was developed to specifically analyze adolescent literature with deaf characters using Deaf Studies, Queer Theory and Disability Studies.

- Deaf Studies literature was comprehensive.
- Disability Studies and Queer Theory are relevant to my research especially for emphasizing empowerment and challenging norms.

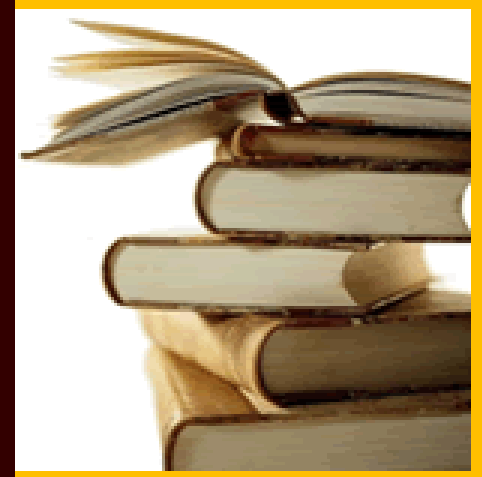
Modeled after Schwartz's (1980) 'Criteria for Analyzing Books about Deafness'.

The Sample:

Reader-Response Survey

- 27* Participant Readers:
 - Deaf
 - Familiar
 - Unfamiliar
- Each participant read 2 books
 - One book written by a Deaf Author
 - One book written by a Hearing Author

(I didn't divulge this but I didn't hide it either)

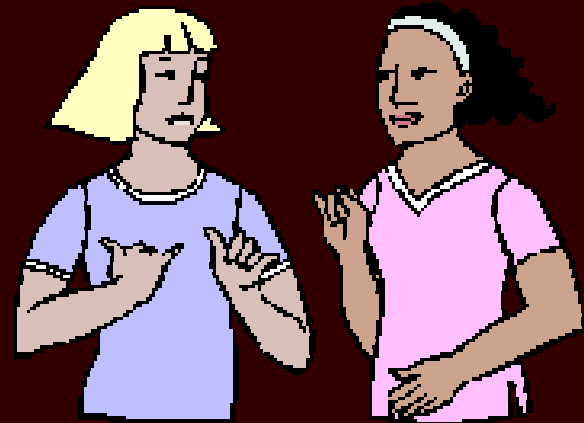


* 24 completed the study:
8 from each group

Location and Time Frame

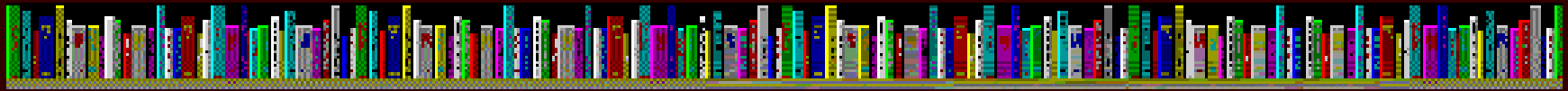
Where?

- Virginia



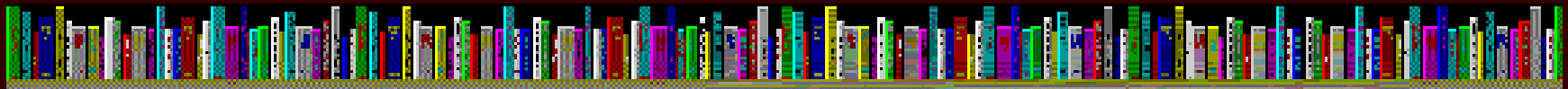
When?

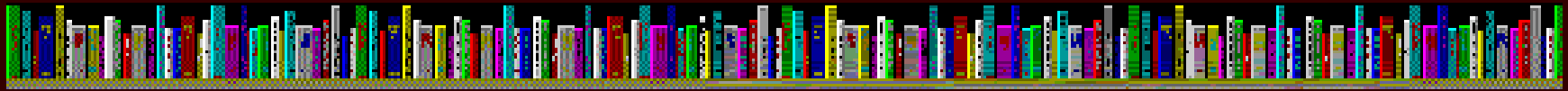
- Data collection: January- April 2006



Methodology:

Mixed Research methods, specifically mixed model research using both qualitative and quantitative research within the research process.



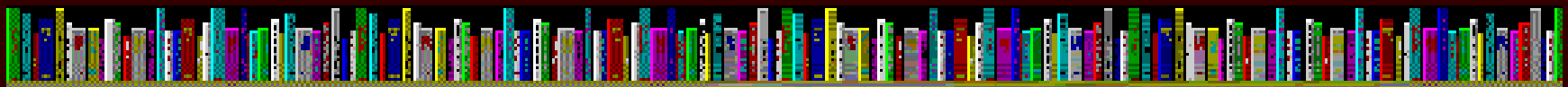


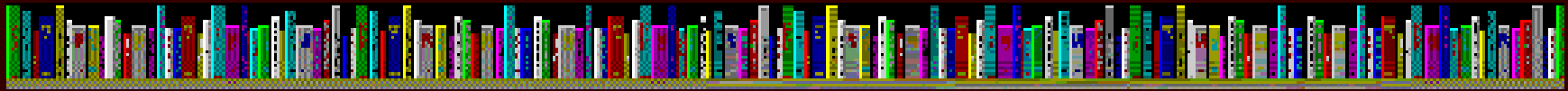
Methodology: Instrumentation

Reader-Response Survey

Participant readers responded to dichotomous and open-ended portions of each of the 10 questions.

The questions derived from Schwartz' (1980) 'Criteria for Analyzing Books about Deafness'.





Findings: Research Question 1

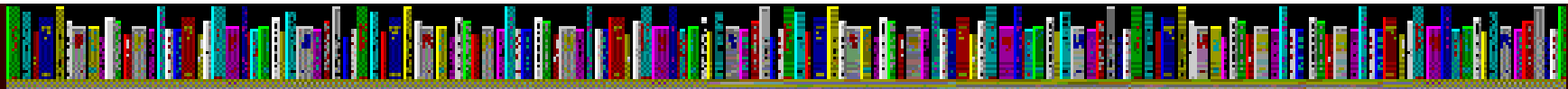
Are deaf characters being presented as culturally Deaf or as pathologically deaf and disabled?

The majority of the hearing authors presented the cultural perspective model.

The pathological perspective model was underrepresented in the books by the hearing authors;
yet, the majority of deaf authors included the pathological perspective.

Reasons why these deaf authors included more pathological perspective statements while the hearing authors included more cultural perspective statements:

- 1. lived experience
- 2. fewer deaf characters in books by deaf authors
- 3. fewer 'D'eaf authors



Findings: Research Question 2

Do these readers favor deaf authors over hearing ones?

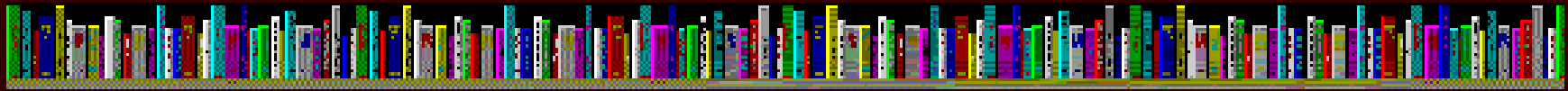
The Deaf participants along with the participants as a whole preferred the books written by the hearing authors

as better describing realistic deaf people,
for presenting deaf characters adequately and realistically,
and
for the authors' portrayals of deaf characters matching their own perceptions of deaf people.

- *In general, the Deaf participants were more critical of the deaf authors while the familiar participants, although as a group preferred the books by the hearing authors, were more critical of the hearing authors.*

Participants mentioned their preference for a spectrum of deaf characters.

- *The books used in this study that were written by hearing authors included a variety of characters.*

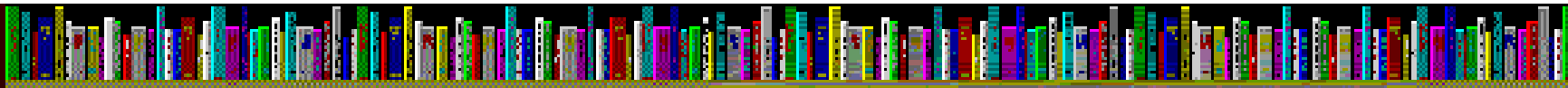


Findings: Research Question 3

How do readers perceive deaf characters?

Themes that emerged from the Reader Response Surveys included the participants' perceptions of these characters as:

- the “normal” curious kid
- the egocentric spoiled brat
- the advocate
- those dependent upon the majority culture
- those isolated
- those searching for their identities.

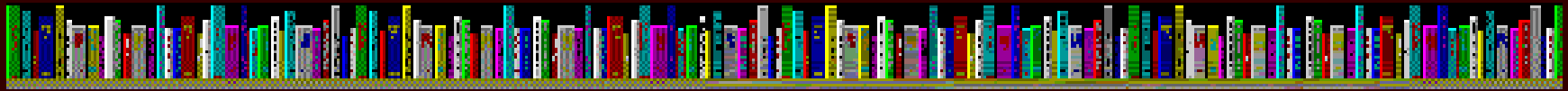


Findings: Research Question 4

How do the participants' responses and perceptions of deaf characters relate to my analysis based upon Deaf Studies, Disability Studies and Queer Theory?

A slight correlation between how the books rated on the Adolescent Literature Content- Analysis Check-off Forms and the Reader Response Surveys.

- The books including higher percentages of the cultural perspective statements were perceived to be more positive by the participants.
- This may indicate a preference for those books including more cultural perspective themes.



Other Conclusions:

Participants made more positive comments about the culturally Deaf male characters, particularly...

- Ben Roper, Jeremy and Thomas of *Of Sound Mind*, and
- Harry of *Apple is My Sign*.

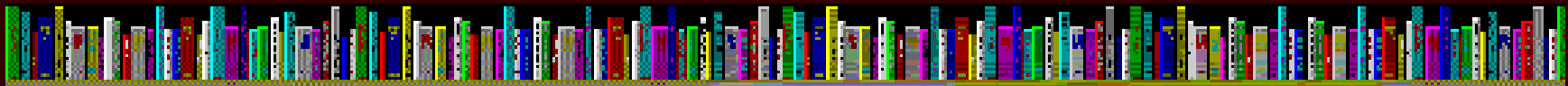
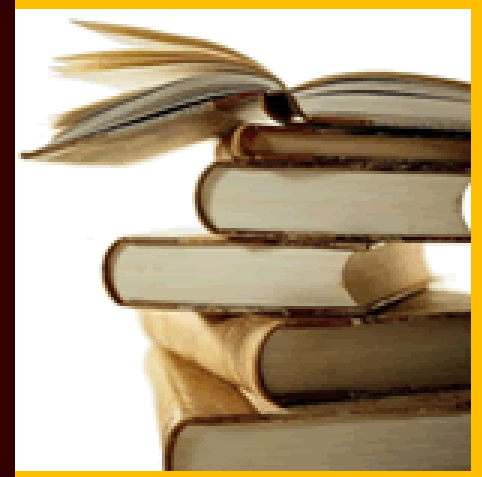
Although the participants were divided in their responses to the various female characters, all of the female characters were criticized...

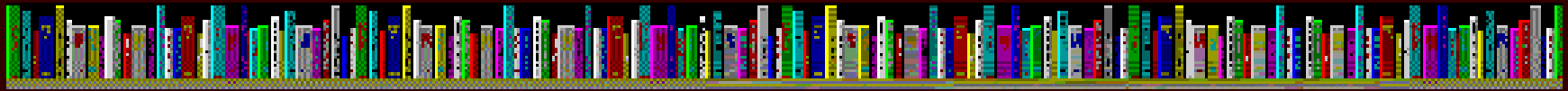
- except for one minor culturally Deaf character, Susan....
- ***(but then, she was killed early on in the book – so what does that reveal?)***

Oh, Did I mention?.....

Participant Readers:

- Deaf
 - 7 Females
 - 1 Male**
- Familiar
 - 8 Females
- Unfamiliar
 - 8 Females



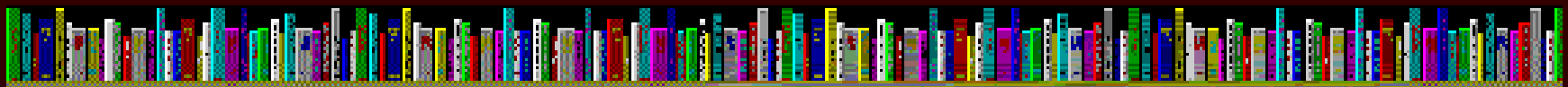


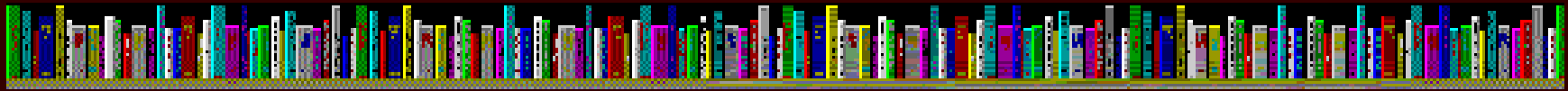
Implications:

Inform teachers, librarians and adolescent readers regarding this unique genre of literature

Increased acknowledgement of the genre in Multicultural Literature

Add awareness to both the literature and to the community





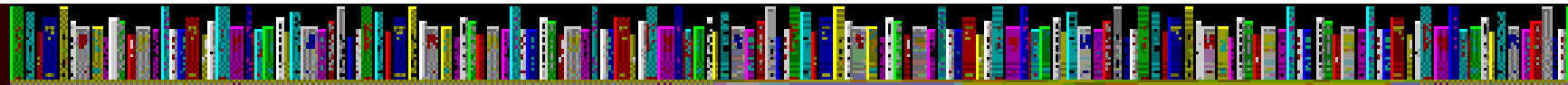
Recommendations:

Components of this study would be valuable for use in classrooms interested in adolescent literature with deaf characters.

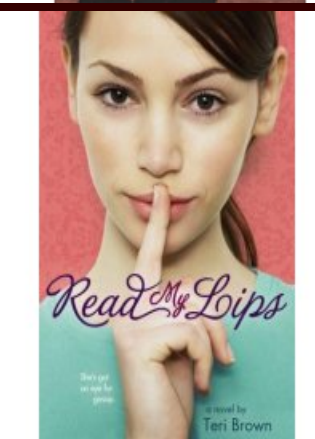
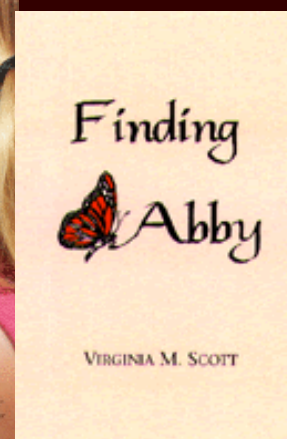
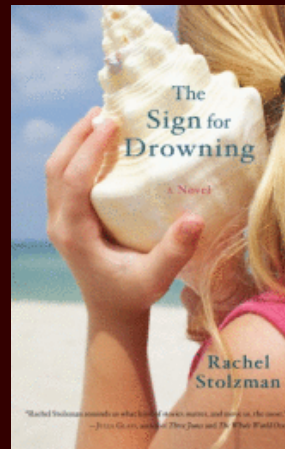
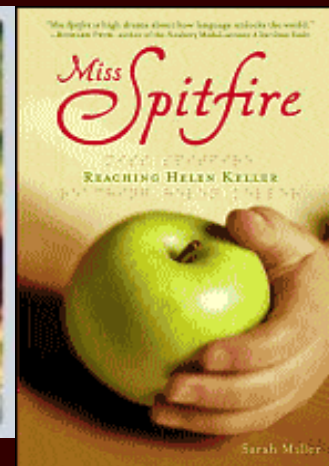
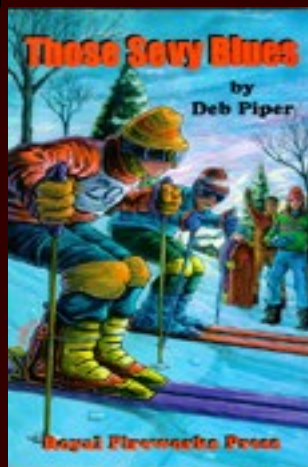
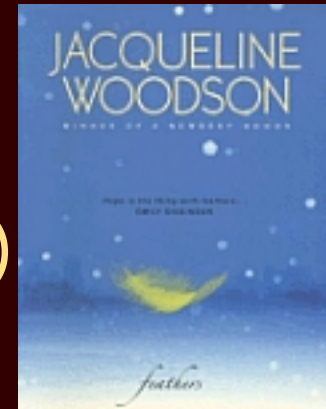
Students read and rate the books based upon the Adolescent Literature Content Analysis.

Students use the Reader-Response Survey to guide them through book discussions.

Students discuss the dichotomy of deafness and incorporate the authors' backgrounds into their book talks.



But I didn't know then
what I know now
(author interviews & insider tips)



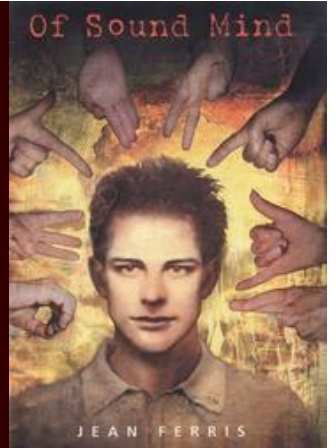
Interviews on the Blog

- Lois Hodge-*A Season of Change*
- Doug Cooney- *Leading Ladies*
- Jean Andrews- *The Flying Fingers Club*
- Ginny Rorby- *Hurt Go Happy*
- Jean Ferris- *Of Sound Mind*
- T.C. Boyle- *Talk Talk*
- Penny Warner- *Dead Man's Hand*
- Jodi Cutler Del Dottore- *Rally Caps*
- Delia Ray- *Singing Hands*
- Jamie Berke- *About.com*
- David Mack- *Marvel Comics' Daredevil*
- Sarah Miller- *Miss Spitfire*
- Christine Harris- *Mask of the Jackal*
- Rachel Stolzman- *The Sign for Drowning*
- Elizabeth Boschini & Rachel Chaikof- *Ellie's Ears*
- Jacqueline Woodson- *Feathers*
- Clint Kelly- *Echo*

- J.G. Martinson- *Deception's Full Circle*
- Megan McDonald- *Changes for Julie*
- Anne Colledge- *Falling Into Fear*
- Janice Greene- *Read My Lips*
- Eleanor Robins- *Just Be Yourself*
- Tami Lee Santimyer--actress
- Josh Swiller-*The Unheard*
- Steve Kluger-*My Most Excellent Year*
- Paul Rowe- *The Silent Time*
- Dandi Daley Mackall- *Love Rules*
- Nadia Wheatley- *Listening to Mondrian*
- Gina Oliva- *Alone in the Mainstream*
- Meg Burden- *Northlander*
- Teri Brown- *Read My Lips*
- Ann Clare LeZotte- *T4*
- Myron Uhlberg- *Hands of My Father*
- Linda Kurtz Kingsley-*Signs of Jays*
- Emily Arnold McCully-*My Heart Glow*
- CF Brunner *Isles of View*

SPOTLIGHT on CHARACTERS

Of Sound Mind, (2001) Jean Ferris



Deaf Characters

Ben Roper, Ph.D.

- Penn State Employee, Model Airplanes, Single Parent

Jeremy

- Self-Confident, attends "special classes" at mainstream school

Thomas

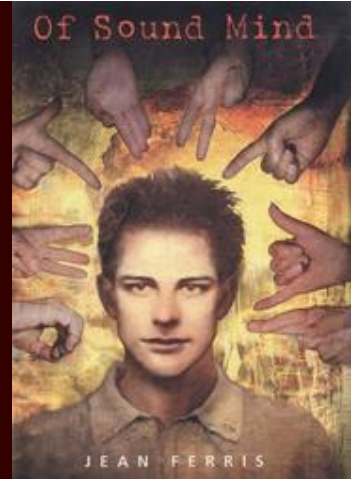
- Carpenter, attended Gallaudet, doesn't trust Hearing People

Palma

- Deaf of Deaf, attended Gallaudet, famous artist
"She is too overly dependent on her hearing son, too helpless, too afraid, too high strung and too much the Prima Donna to be 'real' "(9d).

Of Sound Mind, (2001) Jean Ferris

Jean Ferris



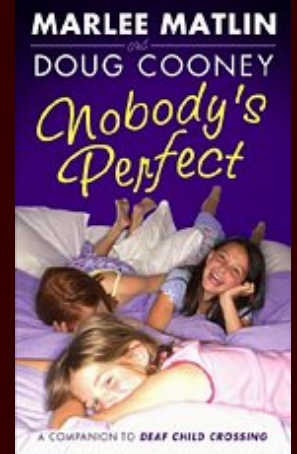
College Degrees: Speech Pathology and Audiology.
Ferris taught a class of deaf pre-schoolers.

"Those were in the days when every deaf child was supposed to learn to speak, and even then that seemed wrong to me. I could see how frustrated these little toddlers were at not being able to express themselves".

Books for Younger Adolescents

Nobody's Perfect (2006)

By Marlee Matlin & Doug Cooney



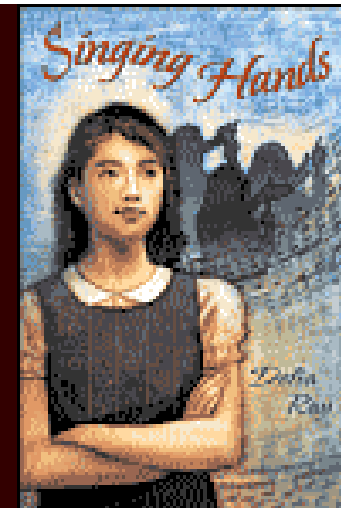
Megan is thrown when a new girl, Alexis, ignores her gestures of friendship. Alexis is pretty, smart, and a great soccer player, but she seems intent on ignoring Megan. Alexis behaves strangely around people with disabilities which is related to her having an autistic brother. Megan, whose family and friends accept her deafness as part of their everyday lives, is shocked by this.



Other Books in the Series



New Books for Younger Adolescents



Singing Hands (2006) by Delia Ray

Gussie Davis is the hearing daughter of deaf parents in 1948 Birmingham, AL. She is a rebellious teen who sings out loud during the church for the deaf where her father ministers. Gussie becomes involved in missionary efforts at a black deaf church and with the Alabama School for the Deaf. Gussie comes to terms with being "the" hearing child of deaf parents.

Singing Hands (2006) by Delia Ray



based on the author's
family...

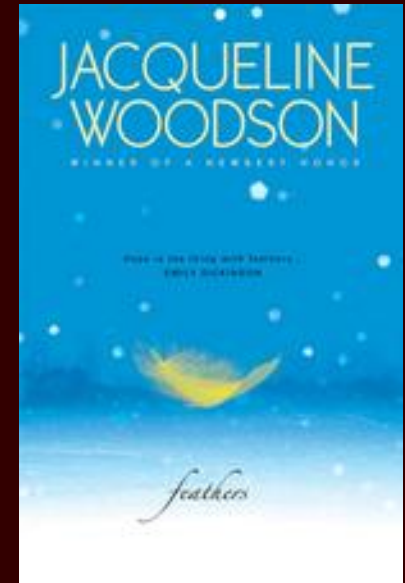
her grandfather was a
Deaf preacher and a
leading pioneer in the
Deaf community.



Feathers (2007) by Jacqueline Woodson

Deaf character **Sean** is attractive, funny, and intelligent.

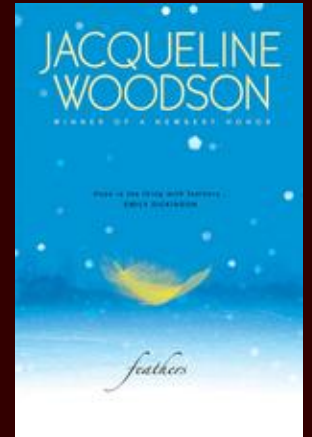
AND, from what I've found in young adult literature. Sean is the



FIRST African-American Deaf character who uses Sign Language

Feathers (2007) by Jacqueline Woodson

Jacqueline Woodson studied ASL at the NY Society for the Deaf for many years



"I wanted to speak to Deaf children as I spoke to hearing ones -- I wanted to be able to visit schools that were for the Deaf or walk into a classroom where there were deaf kids and be able to communicate with them without an interpreter. Over the years, I've found that this makes SUCH a difference for the young person"

Deaf Characters in Comics

Echo (*Daredevil* & *New Avengers*)

David Mack's character Maya Lopez, also known as Echo and Ronin, debuted in *Daredevil* as a love interest for Matt Murdock. This character now appears in the arc of the most recent issues of *The New Avengers*.

(Biracial, Multilingual, Empowered)





For Resources highlighting children's/adolescent books with deaf characters

Check out my Blog!

*Includes over 194 titles

— 35 books from 2007-2009

*36 Author & Professionals Interviews

*Websites & Articles

*Free Newsletter

<http://pajka.blogspot.com/>

